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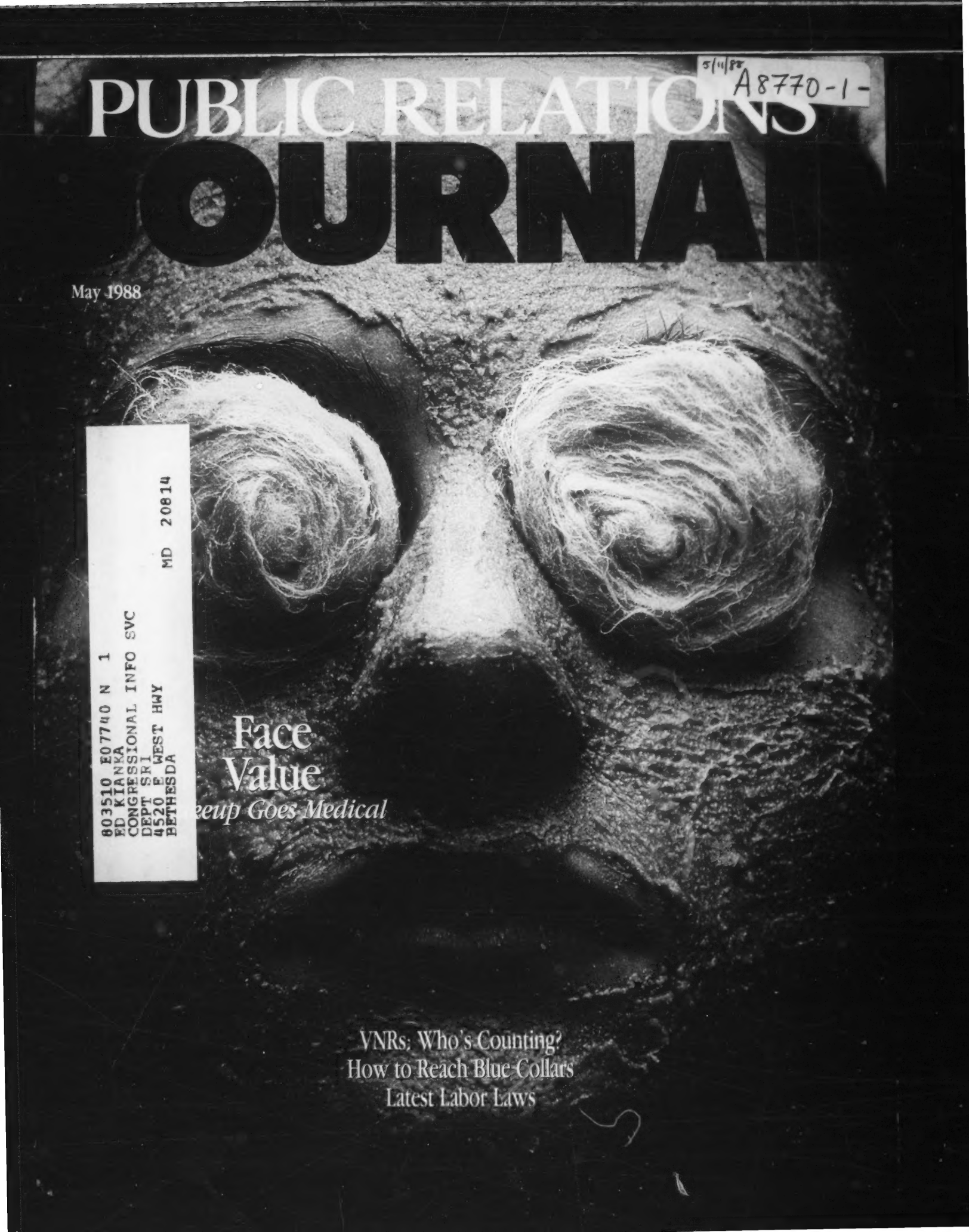
PUBLIC RELATIONS JOURNAL

May 1988



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Face Value

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VNRs: Who's Counting?
How to Reach Blue Collars
Latest Labor Laws

PUBLIC RELATIONS JOURNAL

May 1988 Vol. 44 No. 5

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Cover Photograph: *Ruth Geyra Stern/stockphotos, inc.*

INSIDE TRACK

ABOUT FACE

Though cosmetics public relations is as dominated by women as it ever was, what's changed, suggests Alison Davis, who wrote this month's cover story ("Face Lift," page 24), may be the type of woman who specializes in this area. "It was one of the first places where women could get into the public relations business," she says. "And it made sense to have people who use makeup promoting it. But it was seen as soft and frivolous, and maybe some of the people who entered it were also frivolous.

"But as the cosmetics PR field grew," she continues, "as there were more companies, more publications, more editors, it got more professional, more like the other forms of the business. There's less fluff. The market's changed, and the women have changed, too."

Davis clearly sees herself as one of these new women—a consummate public relations professional who's as comfortable promoting cosmetics as she is doing automotive releases and business-to-business communications. But then Davis's experience is a bit unique: Her early exposure to cosmetics, to the business of cosmetics, really, came not so much through the application of lipstick or the thorough reading of *Glamour*, but through the almost osmotic absorption of dinner conversation led by her father, who for 35 years now has been the editor of *Drug & Cosmetic Industry*.

Davis hadn't envisioned following in footsteps so close to her father's. As an English major at New Jersey's Douglas College, she saw herself as a future journalist, in the Woodward and Bernstein mold. But an internship at Burson-Marsteller "got me into toiletries and cosmetics," and she realized how a lifetime of hearing her father's tales of the industry had prepared her for working in his field. "I was aware of the weird diversity of products," she says. But she was also skeptical. "All the hype is out of it for me," she says. "I can be like the most suspicious editor and write releases, for example, that are effective, not hypey."

So after a short stint in journalism, Davis applied for public relations jobs with cosmetics companies and landed one with L'Oreal. Later she went on to handle cosmetics accounts at several firms before going out on her own.

For Davis, the growing emphasis on the science behind cosmetics is a good match for her own outlook on the field. "I don't wear much makeup," she says. "I'm immune to the lure. I'm not into selling the aura, the sense that you put on a new lipstick and your life is changed. I'm interested in how the cosmetics can really make a difference." And, like a lot of the women she's promoting to, Davis, who is 31, says, "I hope it can do something for me—I don't have the skin I had when I was 22."

The surprise we got when we set out to compile this month's chart on video distribution services ("Now You See Them. . . ," page 14) was the vehemence with which companies in the field denounced their competitors' claims. Clearly these charges are the outgrowth of their concern that their negative image is bringing down their industry. And it appears that many of the distribution companies are taking the matter to heart. In December several of them joined forces to form the Professional Electronic Publicity Association to, in the words of J-Nex chairman George Merlis, "ensure that ethical practices in the highest possible standards are provided" to the publics they serve.

—Michael Winkleman
Editor

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The Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) is an individual membership professional society of 14,265 public relations practitioners. Its major services to members include programs of Professional Development and Accreditation, an Information Center, publications, tracking of issues of national concern, and promotion of ethical practice through adherence to PRSA's "Code of Professional Standards." PRSA's mission is "To serve the public need for understanding and cooperation among its diverse interests by fostering high professional and ethical standards for all those practicing public relations."

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Video news releases always seem to have their problems. First, critics charged that they were too expensive. Then a brouhaha brewed over labeling the source of the news. And now, charges are flying about the accuracy of the usage reports provided by the suppliers: Are the numbers misleading? Inflated? Totally fabricated? Many say yes. And even for those trying to keep their monitoring hands clean, knowing who has used the tape is no easy task. *PRJ* checks out the latest video news blues.

NOW YOU SEE THEM...

By Meryl Davids

DON HYMAN, SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT OF MANNING, SELvage & Lee, winces as he recalls his first experience, about four years ago, with video news releases. He was a bit more naive then, he admits, but, of course, he had no reason to suspect that there was danger lurking ahead.

A "fairly well known" company had agreed to distribute Hyman's pet-care video, and, he says, almost immediately after it was sent out he began to get what he calls "very healthy" usage reports, chock-full of stations credited with using the story. "It started to look too good," Hyman says. Suspicion began to settle in. Hyman had an account executive at the firm spot-check a number of the stations on the list; only a couple of the 40 that the AE called confirmed that the piece had, indeed, been aired. "A lot of news people checked their logs and couldn't find it," Hyman says. "They didn't know what we were talking about."

Enraged, he drafted a letter to the distribution company, demanding an explanation. A great deal of time passed, and still no word. Finally, Hyman says, he got "an incredibly obtuse letter," claiming that his video had been pooled on a larger reel with others during distribution, and that some of the usage reported to him was actually for other stories on the same tape.

The experience hasn't soured Hyman on using VNRs—he feels that they do have their place in an effective public relations program—but he certainly has become a more conscientious consumer. Now, he says, he raises an eyebrow or two when suppliers claim (as many of them do) to be the best in the biz.

And Hyman is not alone. It seems there's a legion of VNR users bouncing from distributor to distributor, searching for satisfaction. True, monitoring video usage is not an easy task; trying to reach hundreds of newspeople, who certainly have better things to do with their days than answer the procession of calls from distributors, is a problem faced by almost all companies. Getting them to return post cards is not much easier. But charges like Hyman's, and worse—of inflated usage claims, misleading audience figures, confusing reports, and the like—are leveled by many.

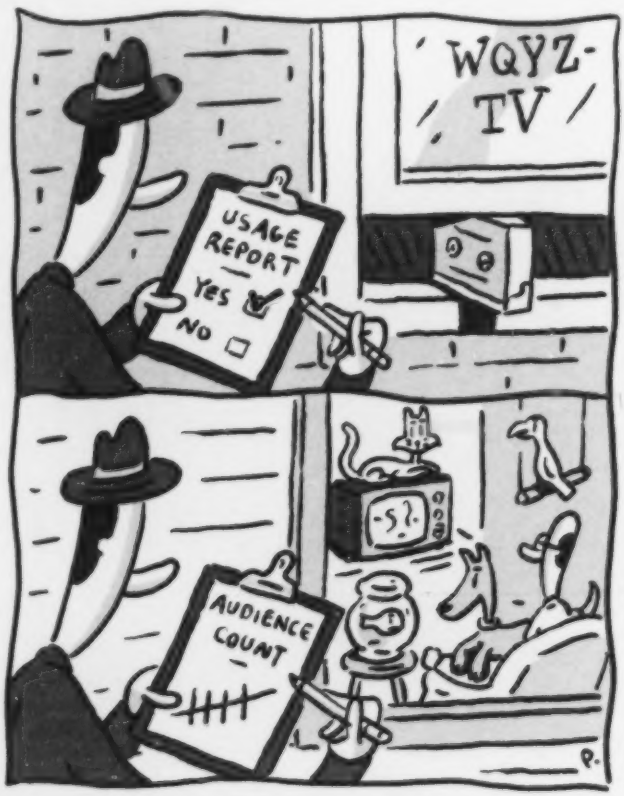
Louise Pollock, senior vice president of Ketchum Public Relations and manager of its food group, distributed two videos in the past year, using two different companies. And, she says, when she's ready to tackle the medium again she will start her supplier search from scratch. "We had to constantly go after the first company for their reports," Pollock complains. "They didn't understand that our clients want results quickly." The second company produced as well as distributed the video. This company, Pollock says, "was very good at production and very helpful in counseling us." But it too fell short when distribution time rolled around, not so much, Pollock says, because of its monitoring of results, but rather because the video didn't get the pickup she had wanted. Like anything else in public relations, follow-through is key, Pollock says. "They said they made phone calls, but they probably didn't make as many as they said they did. I suspect that how busy

Illustrations by Phil Marden

a company is determines how many calls they actually make."

Interestingly, the methods and ethics of various distribution companies are being challenged even more hotly by those in the game. "It is unfortunate, but true, that to a large extent disinformation in reporting back to the client has been the standard," claims Richard Green, manager of research and promotion at Potomac Communications, which in the past year has taken on the industry's alleged lack of ethics in its ad campaign. "These lies hurt the honest companies," he complains, "because the competitor that fudges its numbers looks like it's being more effective—getting more results, reaching more people. It ups people's expectations about what the potential can be for VNRs."

And though he feels like an island of honesty in an infested sea, Green's concerns are shared by others. When word of this article began leaking out several months ago, suppliers scrambled for their phones, pleading with us for fair treatment. It seems that an article last October in O'Dwyer's *PR Services*, a monthly magazine of products and services in the field, listed the revenues and employee count of the various companies, among other information. The article raised the hackles of companies who now claim that exaggerations by their competitors were the norm (indeed, the chart in *PRJ*, beginning on page 16, is somewhat subject to similar abuse, especially on the numbers). Willa Armstrong, president of New York's Armstrong Information Services, which says it distributed 12 or so videos last year, quips about *PRJ*'s chart, "If you've got 30 companies claiming to distribute 30 videos, you've got about 27 liars."



"I happened to have told the truth," Sally Jewett, president of On The Scene Productions, says of the *PR Services* story. "When the article came out, I saw that my competitors hadn't; we all know what kind of business everyone is doing." Jewett, who claims her company's high-end cost stems from the hours her staff people spend researching each local market and pitching the story, says her company looked especially lacking when compared to some of its more conniving competitors.

Armstrong, like others, takes issue as well with the usage reports of many suppliers. "I get copies of other companies' reports from clients who want to know why we can't get results like theirs." But a close look, she says, shows a lot of double counting—counting one hit twice—and worse. Claims of pickup of 50 to 60 percent are lies, Armstrong charges. "Those numbers just aren't there. If you accepted the placements that all these companies say they get, there would be no time on TV news for coverage of the presidential election, the pope's visit, or anything else." That allegation seems to be somewhat substantiated by studies of TV news directors, one of the most recent of which, commissioned by Sun World Satellite News, shows that 61 percent say they "seldom or never" use VNRs, and 12 percent use them merely once a month.

Where outright fraud is not an issue, clients complain that the final reports they get are often confusing—and misleading. Stations airing the tape are sometimes lumped with those "holding it for future use," which means that the tape may or may not ever reach the airwaves (some suppliers, though, do list them separately). Estimated audience figures, which sometimes seem to be based mostly on wishful thinking, are routinely stated as fact, with a certain percentage of all TV sets in the viewing area assumed to have watched the particular show (most distribution companies, however, have taken to using published quarterly figures from Nielsen or Arbitron). And comparisons are sometimes made between VNR and commercial airtime. "That's comparing apples and oranges," says Potomac's Green, "because you don't have the free hand with VNRs to make the content so explicitly commercial, and because you have no control over how much and when the information is used."

Of course, not all of the sour taste for distribution derives from questionable company ethics. Some of the troubles distributors face are inherent in the unscientific monitoring systems that are widely used.

One of the problems, notes Green, is that many news directors will claim they never use sponsored material when, in fact, their reporters, segment producers, or assignment editors do. And the companies that do go after this more targeted group are often left in the dark as well. "These people can easily get confused," Green notes, "and they might think they used your video when in fact they didn't." This mix-up is especially likely when the topic is a hot one. After the FDA approved aspirin for heart attack victims, for example, Bufferin, Bayer, and a slew of other related products would likely have shot out a video. Does the reporter actually remember—or care—which one was used?

Dissatisfaction with this monitoring status quo appears epidemic. "I've done two VNRs in the past few years," says Kim Ward Burson, publicity project manager at Kraft, "and I'll never do them again." The first did not get the pickup she had expected—and, she claims, that she was led to expect from the distributor.

The second VNR was sent by satellite. It was, Burson says, "a fabulous video" on Kraft's "Most Valuable Plate" program, a tie-in with the Super Bowl that pit top chefs working in the stadium parking lot against each other to prepare the MVP, judged by a few of football's real thing. "We really don't know

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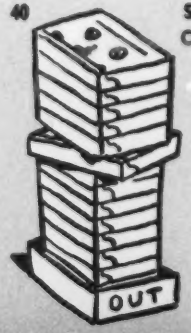
Chart begins on next page ▶

KEEPING TRACK

The following information is intended to give practitioners a better sense for the distribution and tracking methods of a variety of suppliers. The information was provided by the companies themselves, and is therefore only as reliable as they are.

Company	*No. of VNRs Distrib. in 1987*	*Primary Method of Distribution**	*Sample Distribution Rates*	*Does Company Notify Stations Before Sending Video?** If So, How?*	*Methods for Determining Station Usage (Standard Package)*	*Methods for Determining Audience Figures*	*Additional Information*
Medialink 708 3rd Avenue New York, NY 10017 (212) 682-8300	425	Satellite	$2,500 for 140 stations in top 30 markets; $3,000 for 350 in top 100 markets; $3,750 for 650 stations; plus $250 annual "membership fee"	Yes: "AP Express" newswire in 325 stations; TWX or FAX to an additional 325	Reply cards (20–30% average return); call 50 to 60 probable users; proprietary Medialink-Nielsen VNR panel of more than 100 news producers and assignment editors; video monitoring transcripts; "Sigma" electronic tracking system. Final report includes both projected and confirmed users (listed separately).	Nielsen audience figures for specific show	
Pro-Video News Service 303 South Crescent Heights Boulevard Los Angeles, CA 90048 (213) 655-4774	364	Satellite	$1,500 for 5-minute slot on twice-weekly 1/2-hour newsfeed to 650 stations	Yes: post cards to 650 stations; FAX to top 30 markets; calls to all stations in top 50 markets	Call all stations in top 50 markets (try up to 5 times). Final report includes both confirmed users, those holding for future use, and those not using (listed together).	Arbitron and individual stations' audience figures for specific show	
DWJ Associates 295 Madison Avenue New York, NY 10017 (212) 684-4000	200	Cassette	Not Available	Yes: Telex, mail, or newswire to 2,000 programs; send cassette to only those who request it (generally ranges from 90 to 175).	Call each station (until reached). Final report includes confirmed users only.	Arbitron or Nielsen audience figures for specific show	
Visnews International 630 5th Avenue New York, NY 10111 (212) 698-4550	200	Satellite	Not Available (feed goes to 600 stations)	Yes: combination of newswire, post cards, and phone calls	Reply cards (45–50% average return); call all stations (until reached); video monitoring transcripts. Final report includes confirmed users only.	Nielsen figures for the potential audience reached by a station	
West Glen Communications 1430 Broadway New York, NY 10018 (212) 921-2800	132	Cassette	$9,500 for 100 stations; $13,500 for 200 stations	No	Reply cards (30% average return); send overdue letters to those who didn't reply (30% average return); call all others (up to 6 times). Final report includes confirmed users and those holding for future use (listed separately).	Arbitron audience figures for specific show	"Guarantees" 40% pickup. Offers rebate (based on per-telecast cost) if falls short.
Audio/TV Features 149 Madison Avenue New York, NY 10016 (212) 889-1327	120	Satellite	$1,950 for 600 to 700 stations	Yes: Telex to 600 stations; UPI-TV newswire to 275 (some overlap with Telex); calls to 100 stations (can be targeted by client)	Call 100 targeted stations (2 to 3 times); video monitoring transcripts. Final report includes confirmed users and, sometimes, those holding for future use (listed together).	Arbitron "daypart" audience figures (day is divided into a few periods; figure is average for period specified)	

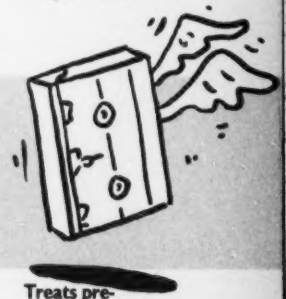
Orbis Medical News 3322 North Lakewood Avenue Chicago, IL 60657 (312) 883-9584	102 (50 plus standing 52-week series)	Cassette, Satellite	$8,500 for 100 cassettes and slot on 1/2-hour national satellite newsfeed	Yes: Mail advisories; calls to 100 to 150 regular users	Reply cards (70% average return); 100 calls to regular users. Final report includes confirmed users and those holding for future use (listed together).	Number of viewers estimated at 10% of households in total market multiplied by 3	Specializes in medical topics
KEF Media Associates 213 West Institute Place Suite 311 Chicago, IL 60610 (312) 951-5894	100	Cassette	$40 to $60 per cassette (minimum of 100)	Not usually (does, occasionally, by Mailgram or Telex for breaking news)	Reply cards (15–20% average return); video monitoring transcripts; call all remaining stations (up to 4 times). Final report includes confirmed users, those holding for future use, and projected users (listed separately).	Arbitron audience figures for specific show	
Potomac Communications 444 North Capitol Street, NW Suite 411 Washington, DC 20001 (202) 783-8350	80	Satellite	$2,300 for 5-minute slot on "Daily Business Satellite" feed; plus $1,000 for 100-station phone notification; $1,500 for 75-station follow-up phone survey and report	Yes: Telex to 650 stations; phone calls to 100 stations in markets targeted by client; letters occasionally sent for non-breaking stories	Phone calls to 75 of 100 pre-notified stations (responses for all 75 sent to client); option to use outside monitoring service for written transcripts (provided at cost). Final report includes confirmed users and those holding for future use (listed separately).	Arbitron and Nielsen audience figures of viewers over age 18 for specific show	
J-Nex Television News Services 5455 Wilshire Boulevard Suite 2010 Los Angeles, CA 90036 (213) 934-4356	65	Satellite, Cassette	$4,600 for either 3 satellite transmissions to 850 stations or 100 cassettes	For satellite: newswire, mail, or FAX For cassette: call each station; send cassette to only those who request it	Reply cards (10% average return); 150 random phone calls; video monitoring transcripts. Final report includes confirmed users and those holding for future use (listed separately).	Stations' audience figures of number of households for specific show	
Sheridan Elson Gourvitz Broadcast Services 20 West 37th Street New York, NY 10018 (212) 239-2000	55	Cassette	$5,500 for 100 stations; $55 for each additional station up to 200; $40 for each additional station over 200	Don't pre-notify if story is newsworthy; call 75% if story is less than newsworthy and send cassette to only those who request it	Reply cards (65% average return); call all remaining stations. Final report includes confirmed users and those holding for future use (listed together).	Arbitron "daypart" audience figures (day is divided into a few periods; figure is average for period specified)	
Professional Communication Services 1776 Broadway New York, NY 10019 (212) 247-7965	50	Cassette	$10,000 for 100 stations	Yes: mail and calls to every station; send cassette to only those who request it	Reply cards (50% average return); video monitoring transcripts; call every station (try each station every two weeks for 90 days). Final report contains confirmed users only.	Nielsen audience figures for specific show	
Modern Talking Picture Service 5000 Park Street North St. Petersburg, FL 33709 (813) 541-7571	40	Satellite, Cassette	$11,000 for 2 satellite transmissions with 600 pre-notifications, 200 cassettes to select stations, and "guaranteed" placement on 950 cable stations (company owns cable system); separate rates also available	For satellite: Telex or telegram to 600 stations for a breaking story; mail for a non-breaking story For cassette: No	Reply cards (40% average return); call about 100 stations (up to 3 times). Final report includes confirmed users, those holding for future use, and projected users (listed separately).	Nielsen or Arbitron audience figures for specific show	



*Many companies that use cassettes as their primary distribution method do turn to satellite for fast-breaking stories.
**Companies sending by satellite *must* pre-notify stations so stations know when to downlink program.

Chart continues on next page ▶

KEEPING TRACK

Company	*No. of VNRs Distrib. in 1987*	*Primary Method of Distribution**	*Sample Distribution Rates*	*Does Company Notify Stations Before Sending Video?** If So, How?*	*Methods for Determining Station Usage (Standard Package)*	*Methods for Determining Audience Figures*	*Additional Information*
Newslink/Creative Media 122 C Street, NW Washington, DC 20001 (202) 737-9454	40	Satellite	$4,500 for 700+ stations	Yes: next-day mail or Telex to all stations	Phone any 125 stations the client targets (call up to 3 times). Final report includes confirmed users, those holding for future use, and projected users (listed separately).	Arbitron figures for the potential audience reached by a station; plans to switch shortly to Arbitron audience figures for specific show	
Planned Communication Services 12 East 46th Street New York, NY 10017 (212) 697-2765	40	Cassette	$1,900 to notify and offer requests to 1,300 programs; plus $50 for each station that requests it	Yes: mail; send cassette to only those who request it	Reply cards (50% average return); call all remaining stations (up to 6 times). Final report includes confirmed users and those holding for future use (listed separately).	Arbitron figures for number of households located in a market; and/or station's average daily viewership	Treats pre-notification like a pitch letter; offers broad assistance, including video, local spokespersons, product samples, etc.
On The Scene Productions 5900 Wilshire Boulevard Los Angeles, CA 90036 (213) 930-1030	30	Cassette	$6,500 for top 100 markets (about 400 stations) plus a handful of other appropriate outlets	Yes: call each station; send cassette to only those who request it	Call each station (until reached). Final report includes confirmed users only.	Nielsen or Arbitron audience figures for specific show on specific airdate	Treats phone follow-up like a publicist; tries to interest station in various local story angles that use video.
MG Productions 26 East 64th Street New York, NY 10021 (212) 688-1455	28	Cassette	$8,750 for 100 stations; $12,750 for 200 stations	No	Reply cards (65% average return); call all remaining stations (up to 2 times). Final report includes confirmed users only.	Arbitron audience figures for specific show	Offers "personalized" service to reach "heavy-hitter" network affiliates and cable stations (about 5 to 10 outlets).
Targetron 156 5th Avenue New York, NY 10010 (212) 463-7668	25	Cassette	$2,800 for first 100 stations; $1,800 for each subsequent 100	No	Reply cards (20% average return); call all remaining stations (at least 2 times). Final report includes confirmed users and those holding for future use (listed separately).	Arbitron audience figures for specific show	"Guarantees" pickup of 30 to 35%; but no rebate if falls short
Worldwide Television News 1995 Broadway New York, NY 10023 (212) 362-4440	25	Satellite, Cassette	$4,000 for satellite for 650 stations; $4,500 for cassettes for 100 stations	For satellite: Telex to 650 stations For cassette: No	Reply cards (30 to 40% average return); call all remaining stations (up to 10 times). Final report includes confirmed users and those holding for future use (listed separately).	Arbitron audience figures for specific show	

*Many companies that use cassettes as their primary distribution method do turn to satellite for fast-breaking stories.
**Companies sending by satellite *must* pre-notify stations so stations know when to downlink program.

—Diane Finger

Continued from page 15 ▶
what kind of pickup it got," Burson says, "because there was some confusion and the monitoring company did not watch for it as originally planned. We were able to verify only a very small amount," she laments, though she suspects that pickup was probably strong. "I am moving away from 'pay and pray' techniques like VNRs," she now says, "because I need verifiable results. I need to go back to my clients—the brand groups—and tell them what they got for their money."

As VNRs become more firmly entrenched in the public relations mainstream, distribution companies are scrambling to separate themselves from the troubled pack. Some companies have taken to touting themselves as more than simply distributors. Companies like On The Scene Productions and Planned Communication Services, for example, claim they approach video distribution from a public relations viewpoint. It is the service, as much as the results, that these companies appear to be selling. Andrew McGowan, APR, vice president of Planned Communication, for example, says that his company's offer to the station is more than just a take-the-video-or-leave-it proposition. "We offer local contacts, samples of the actual product, and anything else that will help generate a story," he says.

Many clients and distributors, though, say it is important for buyers not to be dazzled by the points of differentiation highlighted by a company. A "guarantee" of a certain percentage of pickup, for instance, may not be necessary if the pickup of most distribution companies routinely reaches those levels (some question the ethics of "guaranteeing" pickup where there is no control). And some companies that don't pre-notify stations before sending cassettes assert that not doing so may actually be more efficient. "We've found that stations routinely say, 'Sure, we're interested—send the tape over,' regardless of their actual usage intentions," says Kevin Foley, president of KEF Media Associates, "so we stopped doing it."

In addition, clients should be wary when suppliers claim to have the inside track into the type of distribution—either cassette or satellite—that assignment editors prefer. The promotional literature of a number of companies emphasizes the studies that have supposedly shed light on this important question. The trouble is that different companies find different preferences—largely, if not exclusively, related to the method of distribution the company generally provides.

In an attempt to make their services more reliable, a number of companies have tried to take the monitoring bull by the horns. Potomac has instituted a 75-station phone call follow-up, with comments from all calls—both the laudable and the laughable—sent to the client. The company does not extrapolate to all 650 stations from that survey, but rather relies on transcripts from video monitoring services—passed on to the client at cost, which could bust the budget for widely used videos—for more accurate national readings. Green says that Potomac sends the results of all the calls because, in a twist on Pollock's concern, he says he fears that "some companies are calling far more stations than they say they are."

"To a large extent, disinformation in reporting back to the client has been the standard," says Green.

For example, he says, if they say they called 50 and got 12 positive replies, they probably called 150 before getting that dozen yeses.

More exacting accuracy in tracking usage appears finally to be on the way, however, in the form of an electronic monitoring system. Medialink recently scored a major coup to become the "gateway" to a system just developed by Nielsen. Called "Sigma," the system, which has been "tested extensively" in the last 10 months, according to Robert Frump, executive vice president of Medialink, and was just introduced last month, encodes the video with an identifying number that is invisible to the average TV viewer. Two hundred Nielsen sensors, monitoring more than 1,000 stations across the country, read the number as the video is aired and transmit the information to a Nielsen computer. This system solves many of the problems that have plagued attempts at electronic monitoring in the past, Frump says, because it needs only two seconds of the code to score a hit (others have needed 15 seconds or more, a problem with VNRs, which are routinely edited).

Of course, even Sigma is not the answer to all distributors' prayers, because, as Frump says, "it is not unknown for satellite services or networks to put their own code on the same line as Sigma's." This wipes out the Sigma signal. And, even though only two seconds of the code are needed, if someone does what Frump calls "sloppy" editing and is rough in handling the tape, the entire code can be knocked off. Nielsen estimates that the Sigma system will identify only about 75 percent of all its coded videos.

For this reason, Medialink is planning to fold Sigma into its other monitoring mechanisms, rather than to replace them outright. (Per agreement with Nielsen, other distribution companies can also use Sigma, but they must go through Medialink.) Perhaps the most extensive monitor in the business, Medialink routinely includes such devices as a weekly poll conducted by Nielsen. One hundred twenty or more news assignment editors are asked what videos they used in the past week, when they used them, and the like. Medialink's name is not used on the survey in order to ensure objectivity. This panel enables the company to make national usage projections. But, Frump says, because clients also want market-specific information, monitoring-service transcripts are also part of the package (as are telephone calls and post cards).

But even all of these "nets," as Medialink calls them, are not always enough. Laura Queller, account supervisor at D-A-Y, says a video on a new vaccine that she recently distributed got spectacular results—but she found that out from her own clipping service, not from Medialink's. "If we had relied on their report, we would have been disappointed," Queller says, noting that part of the discrepancy came because Medialink finished its monitoring of the video long before her own clips stopped rolling in.

Of course, not all clients experience high anxiety when they think about their distribution companies. Contented clients do exist. Marsha Cade, for example, di-

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VNR Distribution

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rector of the communications center for the Campbell Soup Company, distributed six VNRs in the past year. She uses a stable of suppliers, she says, because "it's important to get new ideas and to compare results." And, she says, "though I always think the results should be higher than they are," she feels comfortable with the reports she receives.

But Cade seems to be a relatively rare species in the VNR forest. Many feel the industry is founded on lies, and that, as one supplier put it, as the industry grows new lies are folded into the old ones.

How did this faltered state come to be? Theories abound. Many blame the distribution companies, saying that the lack of real differentiation among many vendors may have caused some to seek out "better results" than their competitors. Others think that suppliers inflated their numbers because if potential clients saw the limited placement that VNRs were actually capable of getting they wouldn't bite.

Willa Armstrong, however, points her finger at some public relations firms. "Some of the agencies discovered the great profit in doing VNRs themselves, or, even, in marking up charges from outside suppliers. They tried to expand this profit center, recommending three-part series, distribution by both cassette and satellite, and the like," she says. "To justify these incredibly inflated recommendations to clients, they needed to claim better results." Armstrong says that she— "and everybody else"—has been approached by firms asking her to pump up her numbers to the client.

Of course, many, if not most, firms say otherwise. "I'm more comfortable when the usage reports are conservative," says D-A-Y's Queller, "because I feel that our clients would question them if the numbers were too high."

Don Hyman agrees. "Agencies have the responsibility to make sure they're getting the best value for the client dollar spent," he says. "It's good practice for agency people to be prudent and wary." While it may be tempting to repeat inflated numbers to a client, and while it may be comfortable for a firm to believe in those numbers, he says, a healthy amount of skepticism will go a long way towards bettering client relations and, ultimately, towards making the client a happier one. ■

Meryl Davids is associate editor of PRJ. *Research assistance for this article was provided by editorial intern Diane Finger.*

Cosmetics

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become interested in writing stories about how to protect your skin from the sun. These factors converge with Hines's public relations program for the product, where, she says, "we are now stressing elegant and intelligent suncare."

"Consumers still want to get a little tan, so we provide information to editors that talk about how to do that safely, using Bain de Soleil products," Hines says. "We answer the media's needs the same way the products are responding to what consumers want."

Susan Duffy, now a public relations consultant who last year left her post of director of public relations for Charles of the Ritz/Yves Saint Laurent, talks about the importance of developing a strategy. "At Charles of the Ritz, we worked from a very detailed philosophy and strategy for each brand or product," she explains. "We developed a very specific plan and then implemented it, monitoring the results as we went."

This was quite a change for a company that practically invented the glitzy public relations event, epitomized by the gala to launch the fragrance Opium. But as the cosmetic industry changed, so too did Charles of the Ritz.

"Our approach to public relations became very targeted. The public relations department is now part of the marketing process," Duffy says. "For that reason, we were less likely to do an extravagant event just to make a splash. Public relations has to have an impact on the bottom line. We monitored progress on a monthly basis. Our objective was to create credibility and brand awareness at all levels."

Credibility? Brand awareness? Strategy? Segmentation? Don't worry, the glamour hasn't gone out of the cosmetics business; it is just being balanced against other concerns. "Image is not enough anymore," Hines says. "Increasingly, cosmetic public relations is being called on to stimulate sales as well as awareness. That means we have to justify our budgets, and we have to show how programs fit in with the overall marketing campaign.

"Cosmetics will always be glamourous," Hines says. "But public relations practitioners can't rely just on glamour to get results anymore." ■

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What's Hot—Revisited

In 1985, our correspondents told us, polo, wine coolers, and Nutra-Sweet were among the nation's passions. But passions fade, and three years later there's a new crop of trends, fads, and hot products—many of which have achieved their fame and glory because of behind-the-scenes work by public relations practitioners. An updated look at the cutting edge—and how it was sharpened.

Hot—or not?

Salary Survey

PRJ's annual review—drawn from the record number of responses we received to our March survey.

MindWatch

Second installment of *PRJ*'s section featuring recent research on the psychological underpinnings of public relations. A sampling:

*Long live the sleeper effect
*Fund raising: Brother, can you spare a dime?
*Brand decisions: To know them is to love them

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